

I have the pleasure of welcoming you, also on behalf of the Prime Minister, and of expressing my most sincere wish that you will carry ever further the banner on which the basic principles imbued in the Stockholm Declaration are inscribed. The path we inaugurated in 1998, which was later solemnly reaffirmed with that paramount document, marks a date that someone may consider already remote in time. Yet we look at it as a benchmark of a precise and important time reference because in the span of little more than five years, altogether a relatively short period, the Task Force can witness a constant growth in the number of its members and an encouraging rhythm of increase. The wider number of countries that already are, or are about to become, members is there to show that the sensitivity of the governments and of the civil organisations of the various countries—whether Europeans or not—is progressively growing and expanding to ever wider circles.

However, if this is a reassuring note, it is at the same time also cause for some worry because we must unfortunately admit that such an accrued sensitiveness is probably also a consequence of a widespread resurfacing of manifestations of antisemitism—sometimes creeping and disguised and in several cases also violent—always tinted with a symbolism the extremist roots of which are even too evident. Racism and intolerance are very often two sides of the same face, a face which we strongly and stubbornly refuse for being alien to our way of thinking and conceiving of the relationship between populations and between individuals.

This is the reason why—on assuming the chairmanship of the Task Force—we Italians have purposefully underlined the concept that the task by far the most important that we are all called to fulfil is striving to let the youngsters—those who enjoy the privilege not given to many of us

older people, to live in a world generally devoid of totalitarian doctrines—look at a better world where stupid and unfounded principles and empty stereotypes will no longer be repeated. The horror of the Shoah, an event that we all condemn, yet one that unfortunately some of our relatives, brothers, or friends lived as direct victims or relatives of victims (and to all of whom go our warm thoughts), must engage us in operating so it will not be repeated.

True, in recent times and even in these very days, we have had to witness barbaric acts and grave violations of human rights. However, the specificity of the Shoah, as you are all well aware, lies in that it was an event methodically and coldly and scientifically planned and carried out with the aim of eliminating millions of individuals for the simple fact of their being Jews, even though victims of the Nazis were also individuals pertaining to other social groups or presenting other characteristics, as if the fact of being believers of a specified religion or pertaining to another population were a valid justification for acts that cannot be accepted by the conscience of those who, like us, think it is a paramount duty to model our own behaviour on the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and on other fundamental documents such as those that for us Europeans are inscribed in the cornerstones of the European Union. Thus, it is not by chance that in Italy in fighting against antisemitism and in celebrating the Day of Memory, the highest institutional authorities have always been counted in the first ranks—the President of the Republic, the Presidents of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies, and the Prime Minister, as well as the Mayors of the bigger and smaller Italian cities, not to mention the State Archives and other public and private institutions that all pursue strenuously within their competences the same objectives. Among them I would like to single out especially the Union of Jewish Italian Communities.

The trails to be followed in order to achieve the goal of educating our children to the concept of respect—beware, I say respect, not tolerance, because tolerate means to let or allow, concepts totally different from respecting—are mainly those that engage us in making our children understand, and be correctly aware of, the facts of the past so that these events might serve as a lesson and a warning so that they will not be repeated in the future. Yet, if we wish to educate properly the youngsters, it is necessary to instruct adequately their teachers. Such a task must be performed primarily in our own countries even though the need to try to deliver our message to an ever-wider circle of countries should not be forgotten.

Education is therefore of paramount relevance. Thus it is right that the Task Force should mention in its title, at the first place, the concept of education, followed by the reference to the relevance of memory and in parallel with academic research. Education, memory, and research are in fact the parameters within which must—and this is what really happens—be placed our common action in conformity with the principles contained in the Declaration of Stockholm that we all underwrote.

In order to achieve these results, the Italian delegation—accepting gladly and with determination the honour and at the same time the challenge implied in the exercise of the chairmanship for the current year—has created a Scientific Committee for consulting purposes and has at the same time promoted several initiatives in schools of every order and grade—primary and upper—while numerous research theses on matters related to the Holocaust have been elaborated by the students of the various Italian universities. All these are indicators to be counted in the active

side of the sheet both as far as the interest of the Italian student population in these issues is concerned and in the impact they bring to bear on the more general aspect of education. The fact must also be stressed that many schools have organized trips for their students to the memorial sites. Education means not only knowing the facts of the past but also coming in direct contact with the sites of history that thus become a tangible teacher of life lessons. It is for this reason that, as an Italian, I am convinced that we are moving along the right path. We still have a long way to go, and we must move relentlessly because what matters is not only the knowledge and the consciousness of the past, but we must always bear in mind also the oncoming future. This is the goal that we look at not only with special attention and seriousness but also with the confidence we put in the high standard of our scholars. Therefore, we welcome the suggestions that may emerge from your studies and experience. We also welcome the academic achievements that will emerge from the seminar on Primo Levi beginning tomorrow. We believe that all of us as member countries should set an example in bringing to the attention of our public the specific issues of the Task Force. We are therefore convinced that organizing scholarly events open to international specialists is a methodology likely to transmit the message contained in the Task Force to an ever wider layer of exponents of the cultural and political world.

A positive answer to this kind of action might be seen in the great number of requests for financial support received during the recent months: under the Italian chairmanship the Task Force has already approved projects of cooperation—the so-called liaison projects—for an amount of some 400,000 dollars. It is also relevant that many countries have expressed their wish to strengthen their already existing links with the Task Force and to become full members. The

Italian chair and many other countries have already been pro-active in establishing the contacts—including the diplomatic ones—needed for accelerating that process.

It is with these feelings and with the certainty that the future generations will be able to express at their best the sentiments of human civilisation—as it was the case for many people of the preceding ones—that I wish you all a good work in this our beautiful Italy: IT-AL-IA, as you know, has a sweet and well-wishing meaning in the Hebrew language.

Gianni Letta